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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD

Written statement*/ submitted by the International Federation of ACAT (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture) , a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 January 2001]

*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received in English, French and Spanish from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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ENG

Reestablishing peace in Chechnya and in the Moluccan Archipelago

FI.ACAT would like to draw the Commission's attention to the massive and systematic human rights violations during the armed conflicts in Chechnya and the Moluccan islands; the main victims have been the civilian populations.

Human Rights situation in Chechnya

For more than 14 months the Russian authorities have been waging a new and bloody war against the Chechen people which, according to the President of Chechnya, Aslan Maskhadov, has already killed more than 40 000 civilians.

The organisation 'the mothers of the St Petersburg soldiers', set up to protest against the sufferings of young army conscripts at the hands of their officers and older comrades, has put before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe horrifying documents on 'violations of the rights of civilians, prisoners and soldiers during the military operation in the Chechen Republic during the period from autumn 1999 to February 2000'. They show that, according to evidence even from soldiers and junior officers of the Russian army, the Russian military command has flouted all the international conventions and encouraged its troops to carry out criminal acts, showing no mercy to combatants or civilians.

Civilians are not safe even if they hide in caves, as toxic gas is released to force out Chechen fighters. In the Argunsk gorge, the army dropped fragmentation bombs on villagers. Hundreds of villages all over the country were destroyed, ground to ground missiles crushed the central maternity hospital in Grozny, the mosque at Kalinin and the central market, where more than 280 people were killed. Hospitals and columns of refugees were also targeted. 'Search operations' did not spare women, children or old people. The capital, Grozny, a town of 450 000 inhabitants, was completely destroyed.

In view of this situation, FI.ACAT calls on the Commission on Human Rights:

- to condemn unequivocally the massive and systematic human rights violations in Chechnya;
- to set up an international and independent committee of inquiry into the atrocities in Chechnya, not merely a national committee as it called for at its last session (Resolution 2000/58,
- to urge the Russian Government to commit itself unequivocally to implementing essential measures to reestablish peace, in particular:

* accepting an immediate halt to the fighting and the withdrawal of its troops from the territory of Chechnya,
* bringing before the courts the alleged perpetrators of the violations (which the National Public Committee and the office of the Russian President's special human rights representative in Chechnya have not always done),
* and making a firm commitment to the peace negotiations which began with the protocol signed with the representatives of the Chechen independence movement on 23 December 2000.

Human Rights situation in the Moluccan Archipelago

Major obstacles have been placed in the way of building democracy in Indonesia. Even though Mr Wahid's government has taken important decisions to put an end to corrupt

practices, collusion and nepotism, there is considerable progress still to be made on human rights.

A terrible example is the situation in the Moluccan islands. Since January 1999 the conflict between Christians and Muslims has taken a dramatic turn for the worse, particularly since the arrival in spring 2000 of mostly Javanese armed and trained fighting men from the Jihad (known as Laskar Jihad).

On the pretext that they had come to protect their Muslim brothers who were under threat, these radical Muslims have turned the Moluccan conflict into a 'religious cleansing' campaign. Instances of forced conversion to Islam are becoming more and more frequent. According to local Christian sources, 5000 new converts to Islam have just been identified in the Tehoru district in the east of Seram island. All of them came from a community left for dead some months previously after a series of attacks by the Muslim militia. They were forced to change their religion to save their lives! Further north, on the island of Halmahera, several dozen Christian refugees from the village of Duma were transported to the neighbouring Muslim island of Tidore. There, the women were forced to marry Muslims and the men forcibly circumcised. In mid-December 2000, the governor, Mr Saleh Latuconsina, himself admitted to the press – on the subject of the islands of Keswui and Teor – that it could no longer be denied that they had undergone forced conversion to Islam.

The Indonesian Government's efforts to reestablish order and begin a dialogue between Christians and Muslims have not been enough to stop the fighting or the violence suffered every day by the inhabitants of the Moluccas: 4000 innocent people are already dead and another 500 000 are refugees who have lost everything. In the impassioned words of Pastor Jacky Manuputty: 'For two years we have seen physical, mental, social and economic destruction. But the most painful of all is knowing that we will see the destruction of the future generation'.

FIACAT deplores this situation and calls on the Commission to urge the Indonesian Government to take all necessary measures:

- to repatriate all combatants from outside the Moluccas,
- to exercise better control over the army and police in these islands and ensure that the security forces provide protection to the civilian population rather than supporting one or other side in the conflict,
- to provide protection and safety to the refugees,
- to seek out the instigators of violence and those guilty of the massacres and bring them to justice.

FIACAT supports the local peace efforts and calls on the Commission to urge the Indonesian Government to support the national campaign led by the Muslim and Christian authorities which aims, inter alia, to:

- establish neutral zones in Ambon where Muslims and Christians can meet each other in peace,
- set up a truth and reconciliation commission, with aims which would include investigating the causes of the conflict.